

Pam
Lat. Amer.

*The National Councils and Federations
of Churches in Latin America*

By

Dr. W. Stanley Rycroft



**The Latin American Churches Within
the World Christian Community**

Conversations with Roman Catholics
and the Latin American Churches
Rev. John H. Sinclair

The Role of Confessionalism
in the Ecumenical Movement in Latin America
Rev. Guido Tornquist

The National Councils and
Federations of Churches in Latin America
Dr. W. Stanley Rycroft

Latin American Churches
and North American Organizations
Miss Marian Derby

*This series of four addresses were presented at the Study
Conference of the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, held at
Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, on November 5 - 6, 1961.*

Pam
Latin
Amer.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The National Councils and Federations of Churches in Latin America have been created during the past few decades in response to the desire of Evangelical Christians to express their fundamental unity in Christ and their common loyalty to him, in spite of differences of a secondary and less important character.

These interdenominational bodies are not ends in themselves, but instruments through which different groups may not only express their oneness in Christ, but also may cooperate effectively in certain programs of Christian work.

In his report to the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America in 1919, Dr. Samuel Guy Inman, the Executive Secretary at that time, said, "Five years ago Latin America was one of the most neglected and least known of all fields... There had never been held a conference to consider common problems. There was no union school or union administrative committees in all Latin America."

Today, in 1961, there are sixteen councils or federations of churches and six missionary fellowships, besides a great variety of union enterprises, programs and forms of cooperation. Great progress has been made in this aspect of evangelical work and the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America has undoubtedly led the way during its long history.

Following the Panama Congress in 1916, when the CCLA officially came into existence, regional conferences were held under its auspices, and surveys were carried out to determine suitable comity agreements. In some countries regional committees on cooperation were formed and these were the forerunners of the national councils which developed later. By 1919 there were eight of these committees, two of them with full-time secretaries, one of whom was Mr. George M. McBride, who was appointed General Secretary of the Committee on Cooperation in Mexico in 1919. It is interesting to note that he was supported by the CCLA, the United Society of Christian Education, the International Sunday School Association, and some denominational temperance boards. Temperance work occupied an important place in the cooperative program in those days. In 1919, a widespread temperance and anti-gambling campaign was organized in Cuba. Thousands of pieces of literature and posters were distributed, and "medal contests throughout the island awakened great interest."

It can be said that the ground work of the formation of the national councils in Latin America was laid by the regional committees on

cooperation, the Latin American Evangelical Conferences (particularly in Panama, Montevideo and Buenos Aires) and the many union enterprises and cooperative projects.

Today there are sixteen councils and federations of churches (one of the councils is still in the process of formation), and six missionary fellowships and associations. The order in which the councils were formed is as follows:

Puerto Rico	1905	Honduras	1945
Mexico	1928	Ecuador	1949
Brazil	1934	Colombia	1950
Trinidad and Tobago	1936	Costa Rica	1950
Jamaica	1939	Guatemala	1953
Peru	1940	Uruguay	1956
Chile	1941	Argentina	1959
Cuba	1941	British Guiana	1960

At the time of writing this report nine councils and confederations were related to the International Missionary Council (soon to be merged with the World Council of Churches).

AIMS, PURPOSES AND PROGRAMS OF COUNCILS

Councils are essentially the creation of their member units and they must always be responsive to the concerns and interests of their members.

The declared aims and purposes of the councils are many and varied. Those most common to the majority are:

The promotion of cooperation.

Representation to governments in the name of all Protestants, but more particular the members of the councils.

Spiritual unity and fellowship.

The relating of Protestant groups to other evangelical bodies and organizations.

Evangelization campaigns.

Christian Education programs.

The study of the needs and common problems of the churches.

Other aims include literature programs, radio programs, youth work, the preparation of pronouncements on moral, social and political issues in a given country.

Concepts regarding the main purpose for the existence of a council seem to vary considerably. Some leaders believe they should exist principally for fellowship, while others think they should confine themselves to public relations, that is, to be an official voice for the Evangelicals vis-a-vis the government. A third group favors a diversified program such as is developing in Brazil. According to a plan for reorganization, the Evangelical Confederation of Brazil would have the following departments:

Inter-Church - (Religious Education, Youth Work, Chaplaincies, Literature).

Study - (Social responsibility of the Church, Evangelism, Roman Catholicism, other religions).

Public Relations and Promotion - (Government, Publicity, Publications, Conferences).

Social Service - (Literacy, Welfare).

Immigration - (Refugees and immigrants, migrants).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Financial support for the councils (administration and program) comes from the following sources:

Member bodies (churches, institutions, missions).

Free will offerings in churches.

Individual gifts.

Registration fees at conferences.

The Committee on Cooperation in Latin America.

Mission boards (direct or through churches on the field).

World Council of Christian Education.

The Division of Home Missions of the National Council of Churches (in the case of Puerto Rico).

Fees for special services performed for member agencies (entrance visas for missionaries, radio frequencies, tax clearance papers, etc.).

Support from Outside Latin America

The Committee on Cooperation in Latin America sends funds to five Latin America councils: The Brazil Confederation of Churches, The Uruguay Confederation, The Argentina Confederation, The Jamaica Christian Council, and the Chile Christian Council. Three of the councils receive subsidy for support of their administrative and project programs, the other two only for projects such as radio and literature programs.

The World Council of Christian Education contributes to the support of secretaries of Christian Education of three of the councils: The Mexican Council, the Brazil Confederation and the River Plate Confederation of Churches. The Division of Home Missions of the National Council of Churches also makes an annual contribution to the support of the Puerto Rico Christian Council.

EVALUATION OF PRESENT PROGRAMS OF COUNCILS, FEDERATIONS AND ALLIANCES

The following evaluation is based on an inquiry framed around three questions 1) the achievements, 2) the weaknesses and 3) the outstanding needs of each council. It is recognized that the answers given may be colored to a certain extent by individual opinion, but they can be said to be representative.

Councils which are members of, or in association with, the I.M.C.

ARGENTINA La Federación Argentina de Iglesias Evangélicas (1958) is composed of 25 members and 5 associate members. It grew out of La Confederación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Rio de la Plata (1939). It has a full time executive secretary and a secretary of Christian Education.

Although it is a loose kind of organization it seems to serve the needs quite well and its leaders are conscious that they are thinking and acting together. The federation has created a sense of ecumenism. It has represented the churches effec-

tively before the government and has promoted good programs in Christian Education, summer camps and conferences.

The outstanding weakness is that it fails to reach the bulk of the congregations with a sense of the ecumenical family. An organization its *raison d'être* is not yet quite clear.

One basic need is a program of education among the churches of the interior. A second need is in the field of literature. Funds and personnel are needed for the translation program, an increase in the total literature program (writing, production and distribution), more staff is required to do the job adequately.

BRAZIL. A Confederação Evangélica do Brazil came into being when the National Sunday School Union and the Brazilian Committee on Cooperation and National Council of Churches merged into one body in 1934. The Confederation has a full time general secretary and six other secretaries. Under the reorganization plan there are to be three types of members:

Regular members (Evangelical Churches),

Corresponding members (national evangelical organizations and Boards of missions which have had work in Brazil for at least five years),

Cooperating members (local churches of denominations not members of the Confederation).

The achievements are: a good Religious Education Program, an effective youth program, a literacy program, an outstanding audio-visual work (known as CAVE), social studies, and representation before the government.

The Confederation suffers from a lack of support from local churches and an unwillingness on the part of some to give up able men to the cooperative work.

The basic need at present is to consolidate its reorganization. In line with this it needs to organize an educational campaign in the churches, and to create a greater sense of financial responsibility among the churches for cooperative work.

CHILE. El Concilio Evangélico de Chile (1941) has a part-time executive and twenty-two member churches. For a number of years the Council was inactive except on certain occasions. The need for concerted action to provide earthquake relief in 1960 tended to bring groups together and this strengthened the Council.

The Council has had good relations with the government. It has organized evangelistic campaigns and (since 1960) intensified work in the field of social action, forming a corporation which can hold title to land given by the government for social centers. Its weaknesses are: the lack of staff and an office, a skeleton budget and the high cost of transportation because of distance. There is as yet little dynamic leadership from the non-historic groups.

The Council needs leadership for training lay leaders. It needs a full time secretary with funds to travel, and it should be more closely related to other councils.

CUBA. El Concilio Cubano de Iglesias Evangélicas (1941) has a part-time secretary and ten members.

One of its achievements was to lay the foundations for the Union Evangelical Seminary in Matanzas in 1945. The first literacy campaigns were organized by the Council. It has defended the separation of Church and State, and held institutes on Christian Education.

It lacks a long-range program and has never had a well-defined strategy. The Council needs a full-time secretary, but the present critical situation is not conducive to taking such a step.

JAMAICA. The Jamaica Christian Council (1941) has had a full-time secretary since May 1961. It is an effective agency of fourteen Protestant Churches and organizations.

Its achievements are: Home and Family Life Institutes (with IMC support), a Visitation Evangelism Program (Supported by the Department of Evangelism of NCCC); an effective Christian Education Program; a food program under Church World Service; and a radio program.

Weaknesses consist of insufficient participation of members in committees, due to the fact that ministers are overworked; too much centralization; little concern for and faith in the Ecumenical movement.

There is need to explore the role of the Council and strengthen its administration and finances.

MEXICO. El Concilio Nacional Evangélico de Mexico (1928) has a part-time office secretary, a Secretary of Christian Education and a Secretary of Youth Work. It has three types of members - a) regular members (denominations with three or more local congregations and missions); b) affiliated members (institutions, interdenominational bodies); c) associate members (independent churches or movements). It has twenty-two members.

Among its achievements are: the organization of the Billy Graham campaign; Religious Education program (improved with a full-time secretary); an audio-visual program; conventions of Evangelical Churches every two years; carrying out of evangelical census; a youth program (with a full-time secretary).

It is not fully representative (large denominations such as the Presbyterian and Baptist are not members). There is a lack of support among the churches in general.

The Council needs stronger leadership and wider financial support.

PUERTO RICO. El Concilio Evangélico de Puerto Rico is the oldest council in Latin America. It was formed in 1905; it has a part-time secretary and a chaplain of institutions.

Its achievements include: long-range planning with responsible denominational leadership; an effective Protestant posture on important public questions; a cooperative strategy; the enlistment of support from strong laymen.

Its weaknesses are: insufficient funds for the necessary staff; limited vision of some leaders - (an ecumenical vision is still secondary).

The Council needs a full-time secretary and more education among the churches on the significance of the ecumenical movement.

RIVER PLATE. La Confederación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Río de la Plata was formed in 1939. Later the groups in Argentina and Uruguay formed their own federations but they still belong to the Confederation.

URUGUAY. La Federación de Iglesias Evangélicas de Uruguay was formed in 1956, and has a part-time secretary.

The Federation has served the interests of the Evangelical churches well and has prompted effectively programs in Church and Society, Christian Education and Evangelism.

It suffers from a lack of interest on the part of members in real unity. Many pastors are too busy to give time to the Federation.

It needs a half-time secretary and larger financial resources.

Councils not related to the I.M.C.

COLOMBIA. La Confederación Evangélica de Colombia (1950) has a part-time secretary and seventeen members.

The Confederation (known in many parts of the world as CEDEC) has performed outstanding service in the struggle for religious freedom during a period of national strife when Protestants were persecuted. The CEDEC has brought a sense of unity to its members. It has promoted a campaign in evangelism and literacy.

Being composed largely of faith missions, it has not shown any degree of ecumenicity. Also, its members are so engaged in their own programs they have little time for the CEDEC.

It needs a full-time secretary and adequate programs in the field of social service and literacy work.

COSTA RICA. La Alianza Evangélica Costarricense was formed in 1951. It has seven members (churches and missions).

From September 1960 to April 1961 the Alliance organized a campaign of Evangelism in depth. It has a weekly television program.

Its chief weakness is lack of financial support.

It needs finances to help develop a more basic program.

GUATEMALA. La Alianza Evangélica de Guatemala was formed in 1953.

In 1958 it organized the Billy Graham program and plans are being made for an Evangelism in depth program in 1962.

Its main weakness is in its failure to represent Protestants adequately. It is little more than a fellowship of workers.

It needs a full-time secretary, more adequate representation among its membership, more funds and a large cooperative program.

PERÚ. El Concilio Nacional Evangélico del Perú was formed in 1940, using as a basis the Alianza Evangélica which had existed for a number of years. It has a full-time executive and sixteen member agencies.

The Council has performed valuable service in securing entrance visas and tax clearance for missionaries, frequencies on radio stations, exemption from religious instruction for Protestants in public schools and promoting cooperation. It has promoted united evangelistic efforts.

Its weaknesses are due to the denominationalism, doctrinal narrowness and intolerance of some groups.

It needs larger financial support and a full-time bi-lingual office secretary.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO. The Federal Council of Evangelical Churches of Trinidad and Tobago was created in 1926. It has a part-time executive.

The Council has served as a channel of communication with government and in many matters the latter has sought the opinion of the churches. It has arranged for religious instruction to be given in public schools. The Council has brought different denominations into close fellowship.

The Council is not completely representative of Protestantism in the islands. While members are interested in the promotion of a Christian Education program, this is sponsored by a separate organization.

BRITISH GUIANA. The British Guiana Council of Evangelical Churches was formed in 1960 with the participation of nine churches. The Council is in the process of being established.

EL SALVADOR. La Alianza Evangélica de El Salvador was established in 1961 and is still in the process of formation.

Missionary Alliances and Fellowships

BOLIVIA. The Evangelical Missionary Fellowship was formed in 1948 and has fifteen member missions. While the main purpose of the organization is that of Christian fellowship, its Committee on Literacy has published a number of pamphlets for newly literate Aymara Indians.

In addition to this organization there are the following: Iglesias Evangélicas Unidas de la Paz; Cochabamba Missionary Fellowship; Iglesias Evangélicas Unidas de Cochabamba and Missionary Fellowship of Santa Cruz.

ECUADOR. The Inter-Mission Fellowship was formed in 1949 and is composed of twelve missions.

It has served to bring missionaries together in fellowship and is a channel for comity arrangements.

Its weakness is that it does not include Ecuadorian Evangelical groups, only individuals and that it fails to deal with the basic problems facing Evangelicals in Ecuador.

HAITI. The Haiti Fellowship Meeting is the only organization in the country which attempts to bring Protestants together. Its only purpose is to provide fellowship.

HONDURAS. La Alianza de las Misiones Evangélicas de Honduras was formed in 1945 and there are ten missions in its membership. It has brought missionaries a little closer together. There is a lack of comity, communication and a real cooperation, however, due largely to the extreme conservative groups which have entered the country in recent years.

VENEZUELA. La Convención Unida is a fellowship group composed of Venezuelans and missionaries. It meets every three to five years. In 1960 a United Protestant Committee was formed to speak out against the Ley de Patronato, a proposed agreement between the government and the Vatican.

OTHER COUNTRIES. In the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Paraguay there are no councils. However, in the case of the Dominican Republic a United Evangelical Church, which grew out of the joint efforts of Methodist, Presbyterian and Evangelical United Brethren mission boards, has some of the functions of a council.

Two evangelical churches in Paraguay are members of La Confederación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Río de la Plata. There is also a missionary fellowship of the workers in Asunción.

Attempts are being made to form an Alianza Evangélica in Nicaragua.

THE TASK AHEAD

It is obvious from the foregoing that great progress has been made in the area of cooperation and the drawing more closely together of the Evangelical churches and missions in Latin America. It is also clear that much remains to be done if the Evangelical groups are to measure up to the great opportunities of this historic hour.

Councils and Federations of Churches and interdenominational cooperation as such are not ends in themselves. They must serve a purpose, the glory of God and the advance of Christ's Kingdom in Latin America.

There are many obstacles in the way and it takes much Christian grace, forbearance and patience to overcome them. It is probably true that all councils and federations of churches need more funds and more personnel and less bureaucracy in order to accomplish their declared aims and purposes. However, these are not the main obstacles. The main obstacles are in the realm of spirit: sectarianism, denominationalism and exclusiveness, doctrinal differences, narrowness of view point, suspicion of the motives of others, fear and distrust, a proneness on the part of some to sing "We are not divided, all one body we," and to proceed to promote divisiveness and divisionism and to make sure the body of Christ is kept splintered.

For their part, the mission boards and agencies in the United States, Canada and Great Britain and the Commonwealth nations would do well to seek every opportunity to strengthen the councils and federations in Latin America, realizing, however, that they can only go so far because the main task of cooperation among Evangelicals must be undertaken and accomplished in Latin America itself. The Second Latin American Evangelical Conference held in Lima in 1961 provided evidence that a new and vigorous leadership is emerging among the churches and that there is a growing awareness of a common task and a desire to honor the Lord of the Church by serving him together.

This paper and those from previous study
conferences still in print are available at
twenty-five cents per copy from

The Committee on Cooperation
in Latin America
Division of Foreign Missions
National Council of the Churches
of Christ in the U.S.A.

475 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N.Y.